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ARCHITECTURE'S CAPACITY TO CHALLENGE AND
EXTEND THE LIMITS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES

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Shed Space

The edge of La Boca neighbourhood

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Synopsis

This research explores the scope of the architectural project to propose different forms of production. It investigates the potential of spatial experimentation to transform the essential structure and land division of the city, by triggering new economic relations that may lead to a different urban ecology.

The study departs from the understanding of the role of the factory in the city through global history in light of different economic trends, identifying a constant relation between forms of production, typology and urban impact. The historical analysis shows the close relationship and interdependence that exists between the building and the economic model, and opens the way for developing scenarios of architecture as a provoker, as a tool for generating new social organizations in the city. The research takes the city as a field for experimentation and architecture as the mean to conduct it.

Key words: Architecture, productivity, ecology, cooperativism, project.

1. Alternative regeneration

Changes in production models have left vacant or underused areas with redundant infrastructure and outdated typologies. Once part of the periphery of the city, former industrial areas were absorbed by urban growth but remain segregated within the city. This is the case of La Boca neighbourhood in Buenos Aires, sitting on the left bank of the Riachuelo river mouth. The area developed historically through the settlement of a mixture of industries and working-class housing.

Today, La Boca is characterised by cheap-land, abandoned buildings, low urban quality and social segregation. Market forces are pushing the redevelopment of these areas through real-estate speculation, with the lack of a broader urban or architectural purpose.

As an alternative to this, this research proposes a series of architectural projects along a study area (Fig.1), as the means to alter the traditional path of urban regeneration. Nurtured by local conditions of the built environment and social and political demands, the architectural project uses spatial experimentation to break the city's rules of organization and property delimitation, proving a tool to envision a different reality.

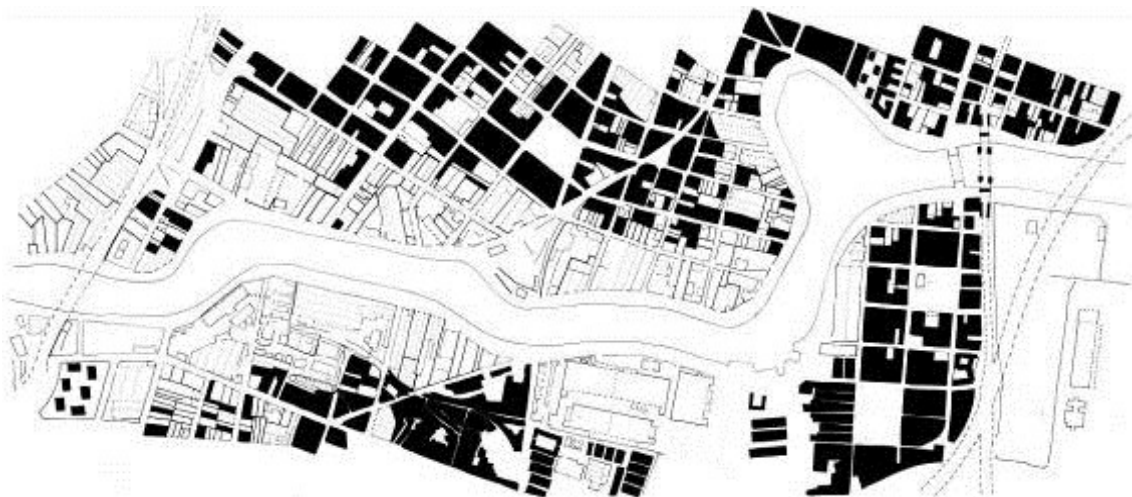


Figure 1.

2. A building for the model or a building as the model?

The evolution of production models and the foreseeable trends to the future bring along certain spatial implications, both in general terms and at a local scale. Historically, this study area was shaped by *The Modern Factory* model, but its later decay resulted in the deterioration of the former industrial space.

The factory, once the fundamental space of production in the city, was both an expression and a driver of the industrial society, and a paradigm of modernity. In this model, alienation and dominance are not limited to the inside of the building. Their effects surpass the limits of the factory and extend to general social organisation and life. "Rather than a building, the factory resembles a system of relations that extends far beyond the limits of any enclosure." [Marullo, 2013].

Nowadays, how do we reconsider these industrial ruins as new nodes for social organization? (Fig. 2)

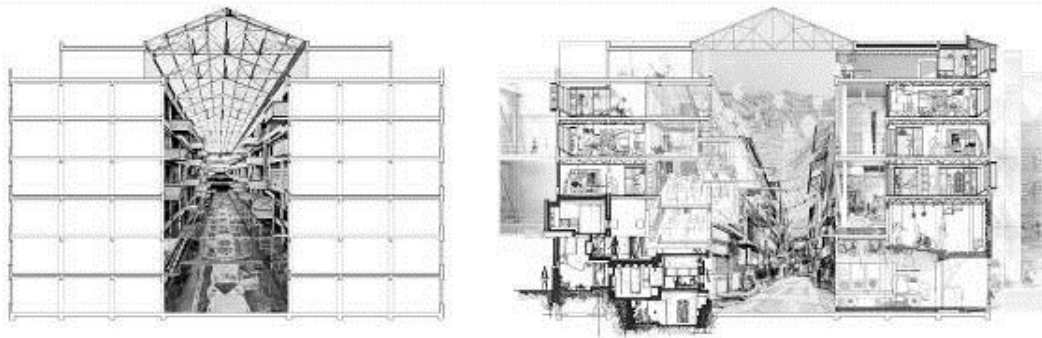


Figure 2.

With the *Knowledge-based Economy* model as a frame, current trends make it necessary to consider the space of production as part of the city, and to create mixed environments that favour innovation. In this context, collaboration and cooperativism are proposed in this research as fundamental ways to add social value to the new forms of production, and hence they become part of the ambition that guided the spatial exploration.

Cooperativism's main point of innovation is implying a different structure of organization. It can as well establish a different space in the city, if we consider cooperatives as a different form of association that is neither private nor public, but lies in between. Cooperativism presents an opportunity not only in terms of management but also on the culture of collaboration and solidarity that it nurtures, and on its potential to participate in the creation of a new common space in the city.

In his book *Together*, Richard Sennett presents co-operation as a skill that can be learned with time. He exemplifies becoming skilled in the world of craftsmanship, by working with others to achieve things that you cannot do by yourself (Fig.3). Once the skill is built-up, the experience of cooperation in the material and practical work can be translated to fraternal action when dealing with one another. Therefore, working experience and social values are very much related, and rethinking the former can trigger a bigger social transformation.



Figure 3.

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Stavros Stavrides translates the question to the spatial dimension by rethinking what kind of space the *commoning practices* produce. “Commoning practices, thus, do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common.” [Stavrides, 2016]. *Common space* is envisioned as a process, not as an enclosed shared space. That relates commoning to processes of opening, and conceives common spaces as thresholds that separate and connect at the same time.

While we can see that economic trends have conditioned architecture thinking, they do not determine its spatial qualities. This project seeks to invert the equation and put architecture at the forefront of the process of developing a culture of cooperativism and a resistance to speculative trends.

3. Architecture as laboratorial resistance

Having the intellectual agenda in mind, the challenge of the architectural projects proposed for this urban area is to create a third category of space with the power to alter the structure of the grid and to cluster components that belong to different blocks, which can offer new spaces of association and accelerate transformation.

The approach is based on the reutilisation, qualification and diversification of the industrial space by **shifts in the predominant typologies**. These shifts exploit the potential of design to transform the purely logistic and functional character of the typologies of the yards and sheds (former factories) into a performative character that allows more diversified and civic spaces. The integration of industries with residential uses is as well essential to keep the quality and identity of the neighbourhood. The focus is placed on developing opportunities to rethink the common space in the city and leverage interfaces to create new spaces of association and collaboration.

Clustering, as defined here, means assembling project components into groups that are to integrate to the urban grid and at the same time differentiate from it (Fig.4). The **components** are the **yard**, the **big shed** (Fig.5), the **small sheds**, the **studios** (Fig.6) and the **new housing buildings** (Fig.7). The focus is placed on the typological exploration of the design, in order to foster its replication across the area following an open, not fixed composition of the cluster. New spaces of association are conceived as organizers, being the key ones the shared yard, servant spaces inside the big shed and the thickened party wall between buildings.

The architectural project becomes then an essential tool to test new ecologies and to envision their potential as catalysts of urban transformation across the entire neighbourhood.

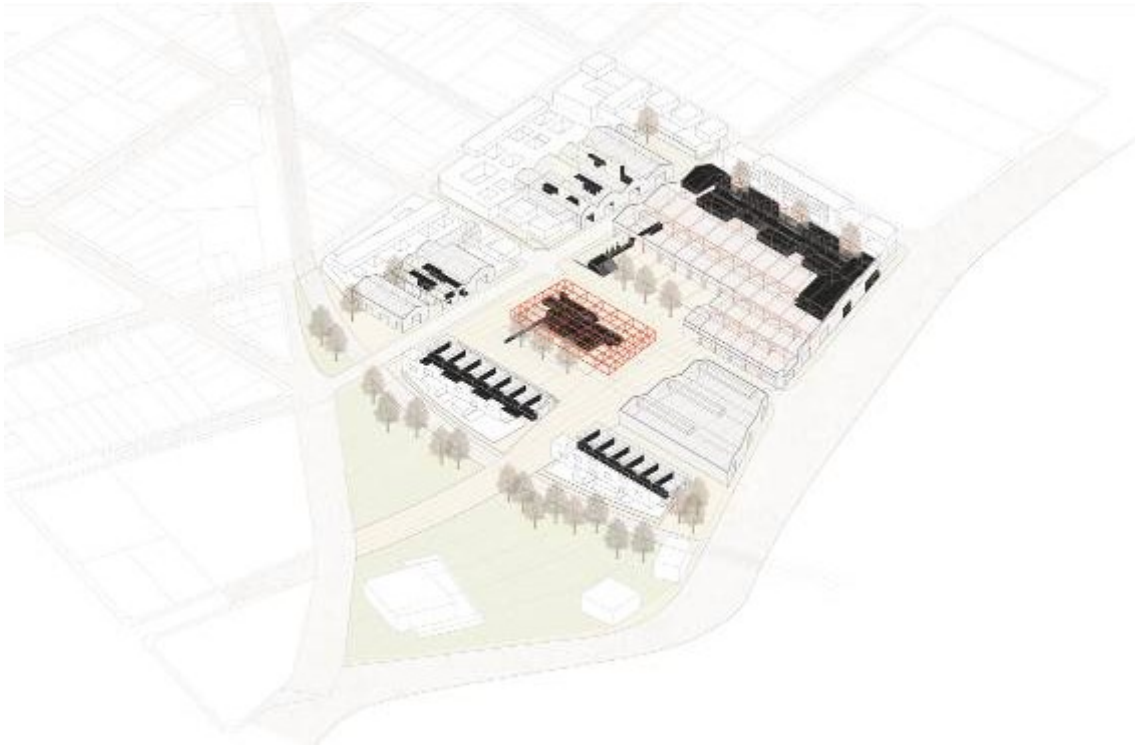


Figure 4.

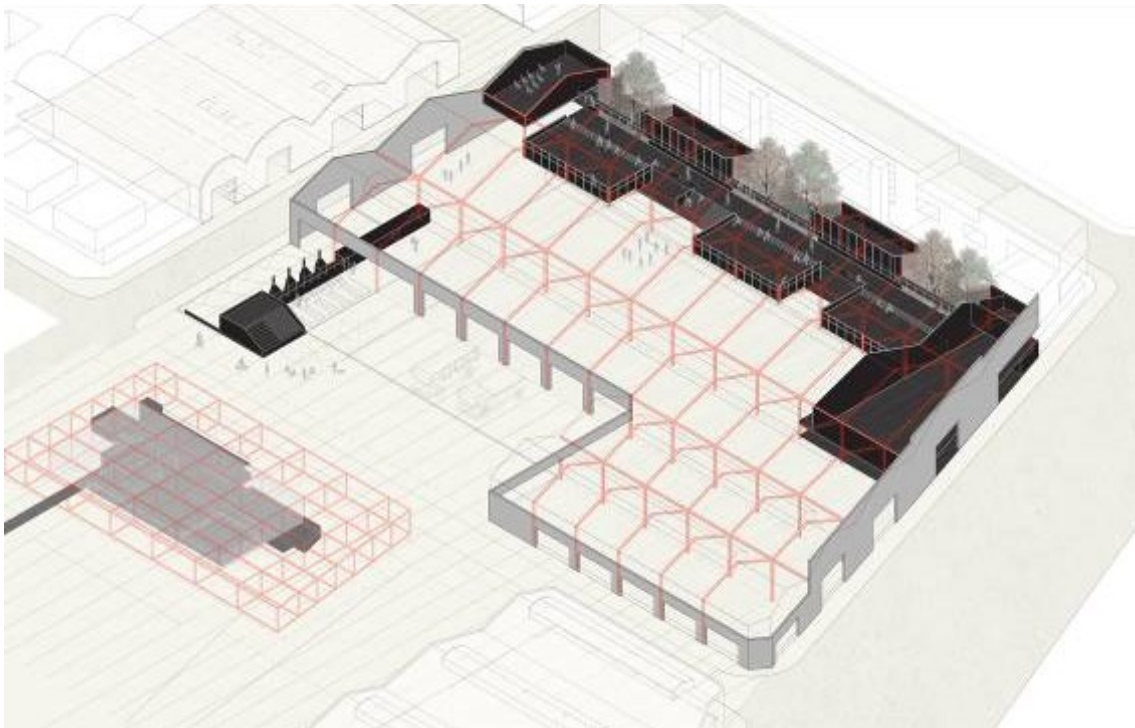


Figure 5.



Figure 6.

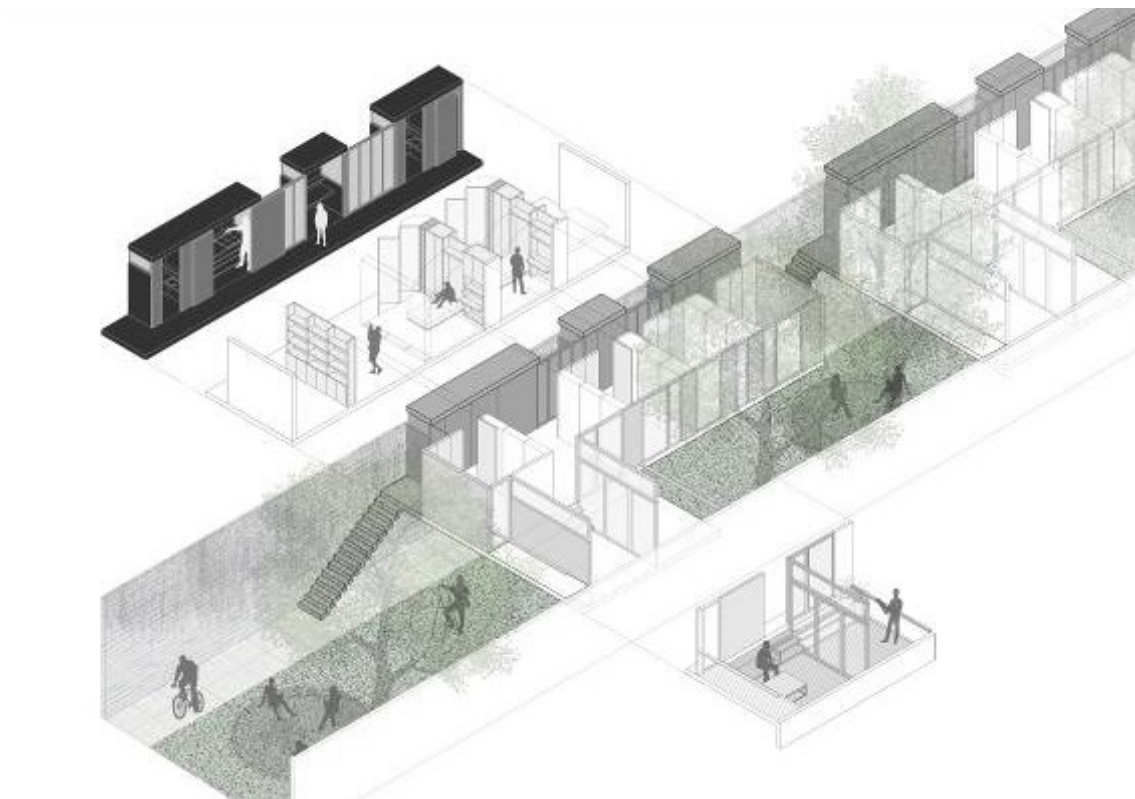


Figure 7.

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Biography

Paula Imperatore. Paula is a graduate in Architecture from the University of Buenos Aires and an MArch in Housing & Urbanism from the Architectural Association. She has worked as an Architect for many years in Argentina in different practices and has co-founded LUPA.ARQ. During her years in practice, she also kept an intensive academic work. She was Teaching Assistant in the School of Architecture of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and of the University of San Martin (UNSAM), both in Argentina. She also had a position as assistant researcher for two years in Projective Genealogy research group at the UBA. She moved to London to continue her studies in the Architectural Association and expand her knowledge in the field of urbanism. She now works in Sheppard Robson in London and continues her research independently.